

Parenting a Puppy

The similarities between raising a puppy and parenting a child

**By Kathy Lang, President & Training Director
Family Dog Training Center**

“We’re so glad we took our dog through training before we had our first child.”

“I am amazed at the similarities between raising a well-behaved dog and raising a well-mannered child.”

At least once a week we hear comments like those from our dog obedience class students. And because we encourage family participation in our dog training classes, our staff finds the families with the best behaved children also have the best mannered dogs.

Here are just a few of the philosophies shared by successful dog owners with children:

Be proactive rather than reactive. Rather than putting puppies or children in situations where they might get themselves into trouble, take a few minutes to puppy or child proof the environment. Pick up, put away, block off items or areas that might prove harmful to the youngster. This also goes for behaviors. A high-energy dog, like an active child, needs safe, planned opportunities to burn off steam, otherwise the youngster will channel that energy into unacceptable or unsafe behaviors. There are even similarities between housebreaking a puppy and potty training a child: a potty schedule, a feeding schedule and a reward system for good behavior. A good parent sets the dog or child up for success rather than failure.

Mean what you say. Nagging dogs is just like nagging children or nagging spouses. It only teaches them to ignore you. Children and dogs learn quickly through experience and example. A parent who nags isn’t taken seriously by either type of youngster. If the dog owner repeats commands that could potentially save the dog’s life (such as come or stay), the dog will never learn to obey the command the first time it is given. The parent who tells the child to go to bed, or brush his teeth, or do his homework, and then sees that the child follows through is much more likely to raise a child that takes responsibility for his actions.

Pour on the praise. People – and dogs – would rather be praised than punished, and they would rather be punished than ignored. Make it a point to catch your youngster doing the right thing and praise him or her. Too many parents and dog owners appreciate and acknowledge proper behaviors in the initial stages of training, then forget to continue the positive reinforcement.

Be consistent. Puppies and children thrive on consistency. A predictable routine maintained by a reliable parent facilitates learning, helps develop a sense of responsibility and a feeling of security.

Have realistic expectations. Puppies go through predictable stages of growth and development that include mouthing, nipping, stealing and defiance. An educated puppy owner is prepared for these stages, manages and trains the puppy

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appropriately. It would be unrealistic to expect a 12 week old border collie puppy to ignore running toddlers. It would be unrealistic to expect to raise a child without experiencing at least a brief period of the “terrible twos.”

Use discipline sparingly and appropriately. It’s important to differentiate between the youngster who is misbehaving due to factors outside their control (lack training, concentration, motor skills, mental development, etc.) and one that purposely disobeys. A puppy that destroys the furniture because it was left home alone, loose in the house, doesn’t deserve to be punished; it needs training. On the other hand, there are some dogs, just as there are some children, who test the rules and push the limits. When they knowingly and intentionally do the wrong thing, then some form of discipline is probably appropriate. Whatever philosophy the family chooses to employ with either puppy or child, there must be a plan to deal with defiance. Discipline need not be harsh to be effective, but it must be meaningful to the recipient.

Acknowledge and encourage individuality. You may have fond memories of your childhood pet spaniel, subconsciously expecting today’s puppy to grow up to be exactly like your first companion. However, even dogs within the same breed, or from the same breeder, are born with unique personalities. Help your puppy develop into the best adult canine he can possibly become and appreciate his special qualities while giving him the skills he needs to become a well-mannered family pet. No doubt this is how you’re raising your child, so why not do the same for your four-legged friends.

Kathy Lang is president & training director of Family Dog Training Center in Kent. She and her staff have been training dogs and teaching people since 1977. For more information on their classes and private lessons, visit their website at www.familydogonline.com or contact them at 253-854-9663.